Book Reviews


Many writers in the Creation centred tradition have remarked that humanity needs a new cosmological story, within which we can find meaning consistent with our scientific knowledge as well as with faith traditions; and to some extent this short book responds to that need. The author sets out the modern creation story, presenting the ideas that are, as he later terms them, ‘consolidated’ rather than speculative. He works with philosophical care, building up a balanced view of the evolutionary process that emerges, and expounding his position of qualified realism concerning the epistemological status of science. Introducing a conception of theology as ‘cosmology + axiology’ (defining the latter as ‘a view of the values that should be realised’) he presents a framework within which many such theologies can develop, making reference particularly to Christian scripture and commenting on some aspects of Christianity. He commends the ‘faith of Jesus rather than faith in Jesus’ (p. 54).

This is a thoroughly safe, rational book, making no claims that could not be agreed to by almost all mainstream scientists. As such, it is a good summary of twentieth century thought, but not a pointer to the present century. We do indeed, as Drees argues, need to deconstruct the old ideas of God as the remote first cause who initiates the universe and then periodically intervenes by means of supernatural miracles; but the argument against such antiquated views has already been explored in detail. We need to move on. And as I read the book, it became increasingly clear why, in the face of the depth of both the environmental crisis and the lack of meaning in society, this conservative liberalism (to risk an oxymoron) simply will not do today. I would therefore like in the remainder of this review to contrast Drees’s view with an alternative, radical, view of cosmology to which I and many others would now subscribe.

To begin with, Drees’s perspective remains firmly anthropocentric throughout, in a way that would disappoint some readers of *Ecotheology*. In the way that he refers to humanity as ‘special’ (p. 44), in his emphasis on our ‘more extensive form of consciousness’ (p. 38), and above all in the way that his advocacy of ‘improving nature’ is based on the criterion of what is ‘better for our purposes’ (p. 85), he seems to take for granted the rightness of humanity’s dominion over nature. Yet this, while a traditional part of Christian doctrine, is now one of the most keenly debated aspects of ecotheology. It is ironic that a book purporting to take a critical stand in relation to religion here adopts an aspect of tradition without questioning. More “green” writers such as Thomas Berry would argue that—though our perspective is inevitably partial, and our moral imperatives rightly start with responsibility for what we can properly control, namely ourselves—nonetheless it is the role of a cosmology to widen our
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horizons to see the preciousness of each one of the beings constituting the web of life of which we are a part.

Next, he is conservative in his conception of science, with a consequent narrowness in his scientific cosmology. Quantum theory is barely mentioned, a neglect which impoverishes his argument at many points. I would speculate that this is because he assumes as unquestioned the traditional view that this subject is confined to the very small and thus has little theological significance. The scientific work of McDonald, however, as developed philosophically by Butterfield and others, convincingly argues that this is far from the case. ‘Consciousness’ is often mentioned, but without any hint of the current flowering of scientific work in the area, represented by the annual Tucson conferences on the study of consciousness, which impinges vitally on his arguments for the specialness of humanity and on the nature of free will. The implications for epistemology of current experimental work on the psychology of cognition (such as the multiple cognitive subsystems of Teasdale and Barnard) are not mentioned. Of course, a book of 100 pages basically devoted to theology cannot critically survey the whole of science; but the extent of omissions such as those I have sketched suggests that his restriction to consolidated science, rather than leading to a solid foundation for future work, actually results in a distortion of the scientific basis of natural theology which future work will inevitably overthrow.

The reason for Drees’s conservative stance can be deduced from the few places where his philosophical caution lapses into polemic. At times he dismisses whole areas of thought and praxis with snide remarks inspired by their more extreme manifestations. ‘Are tree huggers and tree lovers aware of the asocial nature of trees…?’ he asks, with an anthropomorphisation equal to those he criticises (p. 30). Parapsychology is described as ‘constructing a “science” of one’s own’, leading me to wonder whether he had studied any of the recent literature in what is now an active research area in many British universities (p. 2). It is indeed the case that the growth points of science have been the subject of many wildly exaggerated and uninformed claims, but these remarks suggest that Drees has responded by refusing to consider any possibility of their harbouring truth.

By contrast, I would claim that these new areas that I have mentioned change our conception of the nature of living organisms, and of humanity in particular, in a way that would transform any natural theology of the future. To cite one example: in the light of modern interpretations of quantum theory (discussed above), human freedom, many now argue, can becomes a physically based capacity to be a creative agent, thus transcending Drees’s compatibilist argument (pp. 81-82) for an impoverished conception of human freedom. The extension of this creativity to the interlinked web of all beings then allows us to be much more precise about the nature of our ‘co-creativity’ (p. 86). Our action as creators is with the integrated creative action of these other beings, which becomes a creative action of the universe, and points the way to a reclamation of the idea of continual creation by God. Finally, a more careful understanding of consciousness could enable us to accept the validity of mystical experience, not just as a ‘sense of unity and belonging’ (p. 96), but as a transformative encounter with this creative process. In this encounter lies the sense of the sacred which is otherwise ousted by natural theology.

This book clears the rubble of past centuries, and by concentrating on purely classical science it is a counterpoise to the excesses of authors who try to anticipate the outcome of the scientific work that still lies ahead of us. But having cleared the ground,
we need to, and we can, start work on a building that is worthy of those whose ‘soul thirsts for the living God’.

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Only rarely does one read — even less review — a book one would have been pleased to have written! *For the Beauty of the Earth* by Steven Bouma-Prediger is just such a book. Written as part of Baker’s ‘Engaging Culture’ series, and aimed primarily at students, ministers and thinking laity, it provides a summary of the ecological state of planet earth, and a thorough analysis of Christian theological and ethical approaches to the environment, ending with a passionate plea for radical Christian faith expressed in incarnational earth-keeping. Dr. Bouma-Prediger is well read — using material from Aristotle to Tolstoy, Brueggemann to Dr. Seuss. He is also well qualified, having previously published studies on Radford Ruether, Sittler and Moltmann, and having road-tested much of the book’s material in his classes at Hope College, Michigan.

*For the Beauty of the Earth* is comprised of eight chapters, 23 pages of footnotes and a comprehensive 14 page bibliography. The first chapter, ‘Where Are We?’ appeals for a recovery of an ecological notion of place, what David Orr calls ‘ecological literacy’ and Garrett Hardin ‘ecolacy’. With evocative descriptions of the importance of mountain, forest and lake (in a North-American context), Bouma-Prediger teases out concepts of inter-relatedness and complexity in nature, and concludes the chapter with an appeal for rootedness — ‘Settle down, get to know your place, and dig in’. The second chapter — summarising the state of the planet — is high on statistics and will inevitably date fastest, but nevertheless makes sobering reading. Taking ten indicators — population, hunger, biodiversity, deforestation, water, land, waste, energy, air and climate — the litany of greed, complacency and neglect is spelt out starkly. The author makes no concessions to his many conservative American readers in, to take two examples, detailing the population ‘problem’ as being as much about consumption as numbers, and in making the overwhelming case for global warming.

Having analysed the problems, Chapters 3 to 5 look at what Christianity has to say. In a chapter entitled ‘Is Christianity to Blame?’, Bouma-Prediger rehearses the litany of complaint, acknowledging much truth in the writings of Toynbee, Passmore and Lynn White Jr., but agreeing with those who see the problem less as intrinsic and due more to the church’s captivity to anthropocentrism, modernity and materialism. There is also a good, if brief, section (pp. 76-78) dealing with eschatology and in particular popular misinterpretations of 2 Peter 3. The fourth chapter looks at five exemplar biblical passages: Genesis 1 (creation), Genesis 7–9 (the Noahic covenant), Job 38–42 (God as the measure of all things), Colossians 1 (the cosmic Christ), and Revelation 21–22 (God’s renewed heaven on earth). The hermeneutical approach to biblical text is that of an ‘evangelical Protestant’ (Bouma-Prediger’s term) aiming to be faithful to the
Bible as the ‘ultimate norm’, whilst also being attentive to a ‘groaning earth’. This is a crucial chapter in his prime purpose of encouraging conservative Christians to take environmental concerns seriously, and it makes a convincing biblical case for the central importance of creation to God’s purposes. I can think of a number of people I will be encouraging to read this chapter! Having laid his biblical foundations, Bouma-Prediger goes on in Chapter 5 to present elements of an ‘evangelical theology of the earth’—with theocentrism, humans as responsible ‘image bearers’, and an earth-positive interpretation of soteriology and eschatology as key elements.

The remainder of Chapter 5, and the whole of Chapter 6, approach ecological ethics, the former outlining the spectrum of current approaches and choosing a modified version of Aldo Leopold’s ‘land ethic’. The following chapter spells out an ethical approach to the environment, not in terms of duties, rules or self-interest, but using ‘virtue ethics’ to ask ‘What kind of people ought we to be?’ Seven pairs of creation-oriented ethics are presented, from ‘respect and receptivity’ to ‘justice and courage’, each rooted in the nature of God’s relationship with the earth as portrayed in the biblical story, and each leading to a theological motif and a moral principle.

‘Why Care for the Earth?’ Chapter 7 gives us ten possible answers—varying from ‘the earth is on loan from our children’ to ‘God says so’. Each is examined in terms of its positives and its limitations. Bouma-Prediger’s conclusion is that, whilst all ten reasons have merit, the most compelling reason for protecting the earth is gratitude for God’s provision—‘For the Beauty of the Earth’. In his brief concluding chapter, Bouma-Prediger asks ‘Wherein Lies Hope?’ Rejecting technological advances, small-scale success stories, public awareness and education as ultimate sources of hope, he looks to the exiled people of Israel who found hope in the character and promises of God. ‘In a world of wounds, there is hope amid hopelessness, for our Redeemer is the Creator’ (p. 185).

This is a book that I would recommend wholeheartedly to a range of people. It has sufficient academic weight to act as a handbook for ministerial training in any tradition that takes scripture seriously. It will challenge complacency and dispel common objections to environmental activism amongst conservative Christians. It provides a balanced and useful summary of accurate information and of theological and ethical positions. Most importantly, it is a book that at its best provides not only reasoned argument, and detailed statistics, but a passionate and convincing appeal to practical environmental commitment.

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Neil Broom is an associate professor in the department of chemical and materials engineering at the University of Auckland, specializing in joint tissue biomechanics.
and cartilage, bone and spinal tissue studies. This is his first venture into a theological arena, his other publications being peer reviewed scientific papers. In the book Broom offers an impassioned but maladroit case against a Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection arguing instead for a more teleological view of evolutionary biology. At the beginning of Chapter Eight, Broom makes a distinction between evolution, which he defines as the ‘progressive elaboration of life from its earliest and simplest forms to the enormous variety of species seen both in those living today and in those now extinct’, and the theory of natural selection first popularised by Darwin as a mechanism by which evolution proceeds (p. 127). The former is merely a descriptive account of the history of life on earth, whilst the latter provides a mechanistic explanation of the driving force of evolution. It is the latter to which Broom takes exception and, as the title of the book suggests, the publications of Richard Dawkins are never far from the surface as foils for the development of Broom’s position.

The book consists of twelve relatively short chapters and an appendix. The first two chapters offer an account of the craft of scientific research; its goals and its limitations. This is fairly standard material but the best material in the book is to be found in chapters three to five where Broom leads the reader through a tour of the complexities of biological systems at the sub-cellular and molecular level. Some of the descriptive writing here is good. Broom moves on from here to summarise popular (Chapter 4) and more technical, scientific (Chapter 5) accounts of the origin of life. When it comes to the second part of the book, where the subject under discussion becomes the philosophy of biology and evolutionary theory, Broom is less than convincing. The quality of his argument is weak and heavily dependent upon analogy between biological systems and manufactured systems. Chapter 6 is in effect one long analogy between the controlled environment of the scientific experiment designed for a specific purpose by the experimenter and the natural world. It is here that Broom raises the question of intentionality: just as DNA molecules can replicate themselves under laboratory conditions because the right conditions have been provided by the researcher, so also in the real world the fact that ours is the kind of world which allows DNA molecules to not only exist but to function in the way that they do discloses the fact of a purpose or design behind the world. It is here too that some conceptual muddles begin to surface. Broom draws the conclusion that the evolution of life can only be explained in terms of a philosophical doctrine of vitalism. Strictly speaking this is the belief that there is something immaterial which distinguishes living from inanimate matter, but Broom means by it the more unconventional ‘striving toward the living state’ by inanimate molecules (p. 116). This seems to imply intentionality to the molecules themselves and in this Broom is reminiscent of Dawkins’ selfish gene. Broom’s lack of sympathy for his protagonists colours his presentation of their arguments and in one or two instances I was not convinced that he had understood the arguments to which he took exception.

Broom’s target is not evolution as such but natural selection as the mechanism of evolution which derives its power from its ability to explain the course of evolution in purely naturalistic terms. He seems to have fallen into the same trap that he believes his opponents have fallen into en masse; that to accept evolution by natural selection is to accept a reductionist account of life. The final chapter of the book (which is followed by an appendix on the historical development of modern science) ends with a plea for the kind of natural theology that does not enjoy much theological currency in modern times, but which scientists attempting theology set great store by; that

reflection upon the natural world leads to God as the source of all life. There are indeed good reasons for believing this world to be the work of a creator God, but this book fails to give a satisfying account of them.

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According to Nigel Dower, we should think of ourselves as ‘citizens of the world’. He offers us a useful introduction to this so-called ‘Cosmopolitanism’, written from the viewpoint of an enthusiast. His main theoretical contribution is a suggestion (p.viii) that it is not enough to be a citizen of the world that you accept an ethic of global responsibility. A more elaborate three-element account is outlined (p. 7) which goes beyond what he calls ‘the ethical conception’ (p. 141) and requires the existence of additional ‘facts about institutions’ (p. 147). The account is then surrounded by helpful and clear discussions of suitable topics: human rights, peace and security, the need for global governance, for a global ethic and the United Nations. Attached at the end, we find the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and, interestingly, an ambitious Earth Charter (2000); though he says too little about those who produced the charter. The most useful part for many readers will be his chapters (8 and 9) on criticisms of Cosmopolitanism.

However, from my viewpoint, there is a significant overall weakness: he says next to nothing about the possibly rival globalist ‘Green Communitarian’ tradition, associated with such figures as Leopold, Callicott and, on the side of those within religious traditions, Clark and McFague. Green Communitarians insist that we should think of ourselves as members of a global wider-than-human community of life to which we have obligations. So they defend a genuinely global ethic. But the notion of ‘citizenship’ is not stressed as fundamental, even though, as Dower notes, Leopold (1947) suggested that we should think of ourselves as ‘plain citizens’ of the wider community. I think the omission is a significant weakness rather than a minor incompleteness, and for three connected reasons.

Firstly, it needs explaining why we should see ourselves (rather bureaucratically) as ‘citizens’ rather than (more modestly) as ‘earth community members’. Dower mentions the possibility of a redundancy objection to stress on citizenship (p. 13), but does not consider this way of making the objection. There are advantages to the possibly less loaded view. As he acknowledges (p. 142), many critics, such as Walzer and perhaps Miller, refuse to see themselves as citizens because of a simple literalist objection: global citizenship requires the existence of a global political structure that grants citizenship and with which we have some real participatory connection. There is no such thing. Dower claims, in response, that there are institutional facts sufficient
to make us citizens even though they fall short of satisfying this overly strong requirement (p. 141). He does rightly insist that it is not enough simply to say that something or other, in some building somewhere, grants us all rights under a barely enforced international law (p. 143). However, his own reply to the ‘insufficiency objection’, which is based on talk of ‘citizen pilgrims’ is, at best, obscure (p. 143).

Oddly, he doesn’t discuss the obvious alternative reply that ‘citizen of the world’ is best treated only as a good guiding metaphor, so the literalist objection is not to the point. Why not avoid the strain of reaching for factors that will satisfy the literalists by simply treating ‘citizen’ as a metaphor and then taking something like a notion of ‘community member’ to be more fundamental to the best global outlook? Something like this option is mentioned early on (p. 36), yet it is not taken up in his discussion of the objection.

Perhaps the neglect of the Green Community tradition can be explained. Despite occasional references to those who see non-human forms of life as morally considerable (p. 89), Dower does tend to talk as if humanity as a whole is, or should be, the focus of the Cosmopolitan’s global ethic (p. 7). There is no such exclusive focus in the Green Communitarian tradition. According to so-called ‘Pluralist’ contributors, we have obligations to a variety of communities, including humanity as a whole, but also the wider community of life and local groupings. But our obligations to humanity are no more foundational than those derived from these other communities. There are many sources of obligation. The view that humanity is the foundational source bobs to the surface again, even if it is not actually endorsed, in his section on criticisms of Cosmopolitanism. Dower considers whether Cosmopolitanism is (a) consistent with the idea (p. 133) that we have special obligations to more local human groupings and whether it (b) grants too much priority to ‘humanity as a whole’ (p. 134). He argues that special obligations, presumably with appropriate weight, can be derived from a prior obligation to humanity as a whole, so are no problem for a sensible Cosmopolitanism. But this strategy for dealing with the existence and weight of more local obligations needlessly further commits Cosmopolitanism to saying (c) that the wider human whole is the source of both more local and wider environmental obligations. A second reason for seeing the neglect of the Green Community tradition as a weakness is that it obscures the fact that he does too little to explain why a world citizen should adopt such ‘foundational’ ‘starting point’ (p. 134). The view is said to be ‘more radical’ and provides ‘more extensive obligations’, but these claims are far from obvious precisely because he offers no details concerning possible versions of Pluralist Green Communitarian view (p. 135). It is worth noting that a ‘humanity as a whole’ foundation cannot be found in the Earth Charter that he enthusiastically attaches; which looks much more like a Pluralist Green Communitarian document. The preamble (p. 165) cites three sources of responsibilities, including ‘the community of life’ and living humans, but gives no suggestion that one is foundational. There is, I suggest, no obvious reason to think the ‘foundational’ option is part of the best global citizenship view, rather than something whose emphasis in the book partly reflects, I suspect, his briefly mentioned belief that there is ‘that of God in everyone’ (p. ix).

But don’t we need priority principles to steer through a life surrounded by many sources of obligation? Dower calls for the development of principles to steer between what he calls ‘moderate’ and ‘extreme’ Cosmopolitanism (p. 138). Pluralist Green Communitarian principles exist. A third reason for considering the tradition is that priority principles have been offered concerning our various communities, for
example, by Callicott (and discussed by me\textsuperscript{1}), which give the view some direction without deriving all obligations from humanity. Perhaps they can form of the core of a convincing account of the obligations of a would-be world citizen. Further: if we count ’citizen of the world’ as only a good metaphor for someone who acknowledges such pluralist Green Communitarian obligations, then there would be no need to stretch, as Dower does, for the claim that we are already literally citizens. Perhaps Dower may respond by re-using his main objection to those who offer a purely ethical conception: that it ’empties the term citizen of any real content’ (p. 147). But surely it is enough that sufficient content is given for the metaphor to be more apt than not? He does not identify any important obligations that require literalism.

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This is an important book for ecotheology, both carefully argued and taking its context from the breadth encompassed by political ecology, as the title suggests. The author argues that insufficient attention has been paid to the dynamics of the relationship between humanity as in some sense ‘unnatural’ and nature as in some sense ‘socialised’. He identifies the theological task as deconstruction and reconstruction, the former in relation to alternative theologies of nature, the latter in relation to the central place of Christology understood in Trinitarian language. Scott uses the language of liberation to describe this task, both in the sense of shifting theology beyond its preset boundaries, and challenging human perceptions of nature in order to affirm the natural world in solidarity with humankind. Above all, he believes that the main locus of contingency is not so much in nature itself, but in social contexts, so that while he draws back from more extreme renditions of viewing human knowledge of nature simply as social construction, he insists that such sociality and political ecology informs, more than other factors, social and economic policy.

Given the broad scope of the way nature might be construed within these parameters, it is perhaps prudent that Scott chooses to leave out any discussion of the scientific understanding of nature, especially as he associates science with modernity, though perhaps scientific knowledge is rather too readily brushed aside as irrelevant. He selects particular examples of political ecology for further analysis. In addition, he chooses to use the word nature, rather than creation, mostly to highlight one area among the diverse possibilities for nature, namely nature in the political and social domain. He argues that the political-ideological interpretation of nature is less common as a theological style compared with symbolic-hermeneutic ecotheologies.

Overall the author’s style is somewhat dense and at times difficult to read. However, this is lightened considerably by some innovative new terms that help to anchor the early part of the discussion that focuses on the relationship between God, humanity and modernity. Nature is ‘dis-graced’ (p. 8), we move towards an ‘eco-social ontology’ (p. 52). Scott argues — correctly in my view — that simply putting emphasis on nature instead of humanity will not work; the relationship between the two is too complex simply to be reversed in this way. In addition, Scott adds a theological dimension, that separating God from nature is part of the same process that removes theology from public to private spheres. Technology is one of the more important examples that Scott gives in his repertoire of those areas that lead to a parallel separation of God, humanity and nature and privatisation of belief. Technology is the ultimate example of nature’s ‘dis-gracing’ and then its replacement with human telos.

Scott argues that if natural theology is too closely conceived in the lines of scientific analysis, then the content of theology is too closely aligned with scientific theory. While this is likely to be the case, much the same might be said of too close an engagement with political ecology, for the context in which theology situates itself is bound to lead to elements of reconstruction, and some will be more appropriate than others. Hence, Scott is not as aware as he might be of implicit dangers in the approach he proffers, however preferable it might be over against other alternatives which ignore the political and social dimensions of human existence.

His analysis of alternatives to political ecology, such as that of the feminist writer Val Plumwood, is detailed and astute, along with a careful study of the dangers and problems associated with the extremes of personalism and naturalism. Moving beyond the Barthian forms of Protestantism in which Scott has been schooled, he suggests a radical extension of theological categories to nature in view of its sociality; it is redeemed not so much because it is the ground of human existence, but because, like humanity, it is social in its character and orientation. Yet while he recognises the distinctiveness of human sociality, he also suggests that both share a spatiality and temporality. But is all nature and all humanity necessarily social in the way that he implies? Does a lack imply removal from the salvific trajectory? The question remains unanswered.

The next section on the politics of nature covers a number of familiar areas: deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and socialist ecology. Those unfamiliar with the discourse in these areas will find these chapters informative and clear. Less familiar is the idea that more extreme forms of technocentrism are dominant in European culture with deep ecology envisaged as its polar opposite. This conclusion is a contested one, given the more recent social trends towards re-sacralisation of nature, which, perhaps surprisingly, are not discussed in this context. Scott is strongly critical of elements in deep ecology, in its tendency to detach from local and political life through ideological construction, and its substitution of the dynamic of God, humanity and nature with Nature-cosmic self. Instead he argues for friendship, social relationship and a sense of gift, of other than self, while welcoming aspects of deep ecology’s holistic approach and affirmation of diversity. He also is well-equipped to discuss the diversity of contours in ecofeminist discourse, though I had the sense that this chapter was a little truncated. Given the theme of the book, Bookchin’s social ecology is well-represented and also subject to careful criticism. In particular, while he is appreciative of much of Bookchin’s thought, he rejects any sense that humanity somehow completes nature. His chapter on socialist ecology analyses in more detail the possible marriage of
theologically informed Marxist social theory with ecology. The particular conditions of production, natural limits, scarcity, economics of ecological degradation thereby fall into the spotlight. Yet, for Scott, Marxism falls short in offering a vision other than a negation of the capitalism against which it strives. As one might anticipate, it is a theological perspective that is now called upon in the third section of this book in order to fill this gap.

In keeping with the Trinitarian flavour of Scott’s theology, he focuses in the third section on Christology, Pneumatology and God-body. His understanding of Christology is in terms of social ordered, but dynamic reality. Drawing on Rahner and Pannenberg, while being critical of their lack of ecological engagement, Scott reinterprets the relation between incarnation and creation as emergent from the love of God, rather than from any abstract desire to create. It is surprising that more reference is not made to Jürgen Moltmann, though he is criticised for imagining Christ as both cosmic and suffering, yet it seems to me that Moltmann has answered such critique through his prior discussions of Trinity and the kingdom of God. Sociality is not simply derived from the social character of the career of Jesus in Moltmann, but emerges from the perichoresis at the heart of the Trinity; it is significant that *The Way of Jesus Christ* comes after his book on the Trinity, which itself is after *The Crucified God*. In other words, asking how to relate Christ as cosmic with Christ as the crucified one only makes sense in the light of a fundamentally Trinitarian understanding of God, influenced by Ernst Bloch, but also through a consideration of sociality through spatiality and temporality, mediated through the idea of inner withdrawal or making space in God. And this is precisely the move that Scott makes himself, though he uses a modified version of kenosis in terms of ‘making room for’, rather than ‘withdrawal’.

The main theme that Scott wishes to emphasize is that both humanity and non-human nature orient towards God as both social and natural in dialectical relationship. Yet it seems that such sociality arises as a transcendental, that is it is theologically situated first and foremost, rather than deriving from nature as such. This is, perhaps, one reason why Scott seems hesitant to use other mediating concepts, such as natural law, though his tendency to dismiss natural law theory along with fascism and naturalism is perhaps somewhat unfortunate, given its importance in legal theory and international environmental politics.

As the book draws towards its concluding chapters, it becomes clear that the Spiritual realm in which Scott envisages such activity is eschatological but also an ecological fellowship of openness. Such a dynamic relationality leads, he suggests, to an idealised peaceable kingdom. Such a vision seems a long way from standard ethical concepts such as stewardship and valuing nature, which Scott has reason to reject, not only for secular reasons, but also for theological ones. Key among such reasons are stewardship’s failure, in Scott’s view, to escape managerial tendencies, along with a failure to adequately address both natural and human sources of evil, arising, he suggests, from a particular metaphorical reading of the atonement that speaks in terms of representation. Yet, Scott argues, rather like the idea of simply valuing nature, stewardship does not go on to specify more precisely the form of the nature-human relation. The way forward, he suggests, is through a democratisation of non-human nature, thereby enlarging the fellowship that has arisen through the expansion of Trinitarian social relationships. However, he draws back from the notion of attributing subjectivity to nature, which such a view might logically imply, but in this respect Scott is suggesting a representative democracy, rather than a participatory
one. Yet, one might ask, how does the idea of representative stewardship that he has rejected differ from his own position? The answer seems to be that the representation is strictly political, it is through human ‘groups who are (self)-identified with nature or who experience difficulties in accessing nature’s good’. (p. 231). What criteria are used to identify such groups, their validity and so on, is not spelt out.

The final chapter on God-body sets out an ecclesial shape to Scott’s argument, though how such ecclesial representations will affirm the fellowship with non-human nature is not dealt with in detail. He offers a tantalising suggestion of ‘oppositional ecclesial practices’ (p. 235), by which he seems to mean allowing nature to enter into the experience of cross and resurrection through acknowledging the distorted sociality with humans. Hence, instead of a re-enchantment of nature, Scott prefers to speak of a eucharistic participation in the united common sociality of God, humanity and nature. His final section on friendship is suggestive, and while it leans more towards the romantic construal of nature compared with the technological, it seeks to avoid this tendency by a focus on human democracy and social politics.

This book overall has much to commend it for those interested in seeking theological ways through the labyrinth of secular and religious literature on human relations with nature. Scott offers a novel, refreshing and powerful argument for a political Christian theology of nature. There is plenty of scope for development here, for example, how might such a political theology serve to inform environmental decision-making and policy? We can wait with anticipation for the next instalment in the narrative.

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The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) was founded in 1981 in Berkeley, California with the express aim of ‘building bridges’ between science and religion. It has been a major and positive influence in this endeavour over the past two decades. Bridging Science and Religion reflects the philosophy of the Institute and exemplifies the sort of work they have been doing. The intention is that it should be ‘a basic resource for use in classrooms [involved in the dialogue between natural science and religious reflection] in Asia, Australia, Europe, Africa and the Americas’, growing out of the experience of CTNS with the Templeton Foundation Science and Religious Course Programme in many parts of the world; indeed an earlier version of the book was published in Beijing.

The book contains thirteen essays, all but two by North American authors (the exceptions being ‘Traditional Islam and Modern Science’ by Muzaffar Iqbal from Islamabad, Pakistan and ‘The Nature of Being Human’, one of the best essays in the book, by Eduardo Cruz from São Paulo, Brazil). As with all multi-author compilations, the contributions are uneven. The two chapters by Bob Russell (the founder of
CTNS) and Kirk Wegter-McNelly on ‘Science and Theology: Mutual Interaction’ and ‘Natural Law and Divine Action’ are excellent introductions and reviews of their subjects. Ted Peters’ essay on ‘Genetics, Theology and Ethics’ gives a clear and non-dramatic description of the ethical implications of developments in genetics (or at least, medical genetics) and the importance of regarding ourselves as ‘created co-creators’, accepting our place as created by God but at the same time acknowledging our responsibility to work with Him/Her. In contrast, the contributions by Nancy Murphy (‘Bridging Theology and Science in a Post-modern Age’) and Philip Clayton (‘Neuroscience, the Human Person and God’) are essentially philosophical tracts, valid in their own context, but distant from the concerns of practicing scientists. Cruz’s emphasis on what he calls ‘the ontologization’ of concepts of human nature is much more helpful. He wants us to use some of the materialistic insights of the likes of Ed Wilson and George Williams by employing hard evolutionary concepts to describe the limits and problems of our nature, thus enabling us to distance ourselves ‘from the relativistic tendencies of much postmodern and theological thought’. I found the essays by Cruz and George Murphy (‘Cosmology, Evolution and Biotechnology’) the most helpful and thought-provoking in the volume. Indeed, Murphy is the only author to link (or to build a bridge which I would trust myself to cross) modern science to a God actively involved in the creation.

What is there in *Bridging Science and Religion* for readers of *Ecotheology*? The answer is very little in the direct sense of robust crossing-points from ecological or environmental science to, or from, any of the major religions. (There are chapters by Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist and Jewish scholars as well as by Christians). The nearest is a chapter by Peter Hess on ‘God’s Two Books: Special Revelation and Natural Science in the Christian West’. This is interesting in its own right, but is wholly concerned with the history of the ‘two book’ concept (i.e. the idea that God wrote a Book of Works [Creation] as well as a Book of Words [the Bible]), rather than its application and usefulness in the present day. Ecotheologians specific concerns are the way(s) that God interacts with the world in which we live. *Bridging Science and Religion* has much of general relevance to say about this, but very little specific analysis or ethics.

George Murphy is perhaps the most helpful. He identifies three ‘serious challenges to religions and cultural beliefs around the globe’ arising from the ‘emergence of a modern science with its success in understanding, predicting and controlling the natural world (particularly through the technologies developed with it)’ and the consequent ‘constriction of human understanding to mundane reality, excluding ultimate reality’. His three challenges are: that ‘the modern understanding of nature seems to render religious explanations superfluous; second, the long evolutionary history of bio-organisms seems to involve suffering and species extinction to such a degree that it threatens the notion of a loving creator God; and third, the growing capacity to alter human nature through genetic technology prompts a religious reassessment of what it means to be human and the need for constructing a viable ethic in response to biotechnological advances’. From all the ‘possible religious responses’ to these, he chooses to concentrate on the theology of the cross as providing ‘a lens through which people of faith can view the course of nature, seeing the presence of God in suffering and the promise of new creation’. His focus will not satisfy everyone, but it is refreshing and in terms of intellectual rigour and consonance, he makes a better case for understanding and responding to the God-human-creation link than any of his co-authors.
Does *Bridging Science and Religion* succeed in its ambition to provide a basic textbook for science-religion courses? Not for me. I will happily put it on a list of ‘ancillary reading’ but not insist on it as ‘essential’. There is much valuable material in it for all involved in science-religion debates, however learned or inexperienced they may be, but it leaves too many ends untied to be fully comprehensive and, perhaps more importantly, fails to deal with the basic questions about the ‘Two Books’ which we all have to face if we are going to make any serious sense of God and our place in the divine economy.

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‘The “environmental crisis”,’ writes Wendell Berry in a key essay in this volume, ‘is no such thing … it is a crisis of our lives as individuals, as family members, and as citizens’ (p. 200), a crisis that has caused us to construct ‘an economy based on several kinds of ruin’ (p. 202). He and the nineteen other contributors to this broad collection, grapple with the problem of how it is that we continue to plunge with accelerating speed into this crisis of our lives, despite greater and greater scientific knowledge about how humanity affects the planet, and despite a steady growth in good intentions. As it was expressed by Aldo Leopold (a seminal figure in American environmentalism, whose work is central for many authors in this volume), ‘Concurrent growth in knowledge of land, good intention toward land, and abuse of land presents a paradox that baffles me’ (p. 43). His proposal was that we require a ‘third step ethic’ of ‘relation to the land and the animals and plants that grow upon it’ to follow the first two steps dealing with relations between individuals (‘the Mosaic Decalogue’) and relations between individuals and society (‘later accretions’, p. 176). Such an ethic must, however, be much more than an intellectual prescription: ‘We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in’ (p. 19). These words delineate the strands of science, spirituality and religion that need to be in place if humanity is to arrive at such an ethic, and which are examined in turn in this volume.

On the scientific side, Ursula Goodenough argues strongly that understanding nature can, of itself, lead to a subjective response of love of, and respect for nature. For her, knowing how species work enables us to connect with them. ‘Trees speak in electron and carbon and chemical bonds and DNA’ (p. 20). Connection, we might infer, in turn binds our destiny to theirs, so that their diminishment becomes our diminishment. Thus it would follow that an original self-centred or anthropocentric impetus would become ecocentric. Other authors with links to science, however, take
considerably further the need to acknowledge anthropocentrism rather than denying it. Dave Preble and Carl Safina, taking the destruction of fish stocks as their example, claim that ‘taken by itself, altruism will lead us as far astray as unrestrained self-interest’ (p. 179). Their article represents a minority argument which makes it hard to see what role altruism can have at all in a land ethic, and leaves little space for the delight and love for nature expressed by Goodenough.

The religious contributions arise from an awareness that only radical reconstruction will allow an adequate response. Mary Evelyn Tucker singles out the need for restoring a cosmological sensibility, and she traces this through the various book-based religions of the world, though she omits the primal religions which have never lost this sensibility. (Indigenous voices are absent from the book, as are voices from the more radical feminist perspectives.) The need for cosmology is also well endorsed by Margaret Fowler, citing the Christian tradition of the ‘two books’ of scripture and nature. A common thread emerges pointing to the reinvention of theism on a new basis centering on the cosmos rather than on human individuality.

Spirituality is entwined in many of the essays. An interesting theme argues in support of the spirituality of Darwinism, as first expounded by Leopold. Strachan Donnelly characterises this in terms of the overthrow by Darwin of three old modes of thought inimical to a land ethic: *cosmic teleology*—nature’s grand divine design and Designer… *Newtonian determinism*, the hegemony of…eternal unbreachable laws of nature… [and] *essentialist* thinking’ (p. 164). The overthrow of this last means that thought ‘in terms of species types (horse, dog, rose, human being) is replaced by populational thinking… [I]ndividuality and particularity hold for populations, communities, ecosystems, and bioregions.‘

Even more thought provoking is the account by David Peterson of the spirituality of the hunter. His practice of hunting is the antithesis of that mainly practised in England: he describes the weeks spent in the wild tracking a deer, until he finally encounters it in a kind of union, when he shoots it with a bow, butchers it, and spends the next day hauling the meat back to his cabin where it will feed him for the winter. He contrasts this with the life of the Vegan eating mange-tout peas flown in from Nigeria.

This essay was one of the few that brought me to moments of breakthrough, where a new vision was being presented, even if in need of qualification. The others included Dorion Sagan and Lynn Margulis ‘Gaia and the ethical abyss’, reminding us that ‘Ethics is a construct, a mask whose arbitrariness we must conceal if we are to believe that goodness has a face’ (p.92); and the story-telling of Terry Tempest Williams viewing the collapse of the environment through the imagery of Hieronymus Bosch’s depiction of Hell. But the pride of place for me goes to Wendell Berry, whom I quoted at the start. His essay on ‘The Idea of a Local Economy’ combines the passion for the land of a farmer with a pithy and insightful economic analysis. He argues that the crisis we face arises from our handing over power to proxies, first governments, then corporations, who provide a ‘sentimental economics’ where rewards for the people lie entirely in the future, but where present reality is the increase of the corporations’ own power. This crisis of our lives, he claims, cannot be overcome by good intentions, but only by reclaiming our power through developing local economies, starting with food. An implicit but powerful spirituality of the earth breathes through the whole of his analysis, which unites justice, ecology and politics.
This essay alone would make the book well worth buying, and many of the others are equally far-reaching in their conclusions.

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